

Health Risks from Consuming Raw (Unpasteurized) Milk and Milk Products

❑ ARE THERE HEALTH RISKS FROM CONSUMING RAW MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS?

- ✓ Yes. Drinking raw (unpasteurized) milk, or eating products made from raw milk, such as cream, cheese or yogurt, can be dangerous because raw milk can be contaminated with harmful bacteria.
- ✓ Contaminated raw milk and milk products can cause:
 - Diarrhea and stomach pain, (which may be severe), from infections with *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, or *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria
 - Severe kidney damage from infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 (called hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS)
 - Miscarriage/stillbirth, or severe illness or death in the newborn when a pregnant woman is infected with *Listeria* bacteria
 - Fevers and joint or bone damage caused by infection with *Brucella* bacteria (brucellosis)
 - In some parts of the world raw milk can also be contaminated with the bacteria that cause tuberculosis and diphtheria.
- ✓ People with weakened immune systems, including young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions, are at highest risk for severe infections from contaminated raw milk and milk products.

❑ WHAT IS PASTEURIZATION?

Pasteurization is the process of heating raw milk to kill harmful bacteria that can cause illness and make milk spoil. Pasteurization increases the shelf life of milk and milk products; however, pasteurized products do spoil and need to be refrigerated.

❑ WHAT IS RAW MILK?

- ✓ Raw milk is milk from animals, typically cows and goats, which has not been pasteurized.
- ✓ Some people believe that raw milk is more nutritious than pasteurized milk; however, the major nutrients in milk are not affected by pasteurization.
- ✓ Vitamin D, which enhances the body's ability to absorb calcium, is present in much higher quantities in pasteurized milk because vitamin D is added during processing.

❑ HOW CAN I PREVENT ILLNESS FROM DAIRY PRODUCTS?

- ✓ Be aware of the risks of drinking raw milk or eating products made from raw milk.
- ✓ **Public Health strongly recommends that young children, elderly persons, and persons with weakened immune systems consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.**
- ✓ Read the label! In Washington State it is legal to sell raw milk but it must be clearly labeled and the farms that supply these products locally must be licensed by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. It is important to know that licensing of a dairy farm does not guarantee that raw milk and milk products are free of harmful bacteria.
- ✓ The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows the manufacture and interstate sale of raw milk cheeses that are aged for at least 60 days at a temperature not less than 35 degrees Fahrenheit. The FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) is currently examining the safety of raw milk cheeses.